

# Planning an Accessible Vacation

By Eric Lipp, Executive Director for Open Doors Organization

We all know that vacation planning can be pretty overwhelming. You need information for flights, hotels, car rental, attractions, restaurants - and the list goes on. For “family” vacations, you also have to take into account the needs and desires of children and sometimes grandparents as well. If one or more people with disabilities are included in your travel plans, this is an even more daunting challenge.

As a person with a disability, I know that it takes careful, precise planning for me to travel. Sometimes I need the vacation just because of all the grueling time I put in on the Internet and phone trying to prearrange as much as possible. I have restricted mobility so I wear my disability like the scarlet letter, but millions with developmental disabilities have non-apparent disabilities that can make it all the more difficult. How many times have you tried to convince the airline that your loved one is capable of traveling alone? Alternatively, how many have never even attempted this because they fear something may go wrong?

Certainly I wish I had all the answers but I do not. However, I and the staff at Open Doors Organization ([www.opendoorsnfp.org](http://www.opendoorsnfp.org)) continue to advocate on behalf of people with disabilities in travel and tourism. There is a lot that needs to be done and not enough buy-in from corporate America to get it done quickly.

Open Doors Organization believes that every city should have a comprehensive access guide similar to the one we authored for Chicago ([learn more at www.easyaccesschicago.org](http://www.easyaccesschicago.org)). The tourism industry still fails to adequately realize our desire to get out of the house and see the city, state, country and world. There are just too many obstacles and not enough services to make travel easy.

Detailed access guides need to be available so people can readily get the information to make good, informed decisions. For instance, our Easy Access Chicago guide includes everything from resources for adult daycare, to exact specifications – even down to bed height – for many hotel rooms. The guide has been out over two years and, to my amazement, the bulk of the users are citizens of Chicago and the Chicago-area.

In an effort to make your travel experiences easier, here are my top 10 tips for your travel:

## **For Air Travel**

1. Book non-stop flights

2. Think “safety for everyone” before you let someone with a developmental or other cognitive disability fly alone

3. If a problem arises, ask for the airline’s Complaints Resolution Official

**For Hotels**

4. Request rooms on the ground floor

5. Ask very specific questions concerning accessibility

6. Provide an orientation to the hotel including elevators, guest room, exits, etc.

7. Notify the front desk so in case there’s an emergency, they will understand that a person with a disability is on the premises

**For Cruising**

8. Request rooms that adjoin or are in close proximity

9. Notify your room attendant so they are aware and may help

10. Call the cruise line to see if they offer any other special services

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